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THOMAS

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I

The river is the only successful rebel in all that stretch of red-earthed, scarred country. Elsewhere, on the hill-sides, as if made by galling chains, deep fissures show where the earth had made successive, foiled attempts to break from the harsh fetters of barrenness; heavy, gnarled roots of crippled trees are black, mute witness to broken efforts of escape from the stern bondage that holds trees and hills in merciless control.

But the river is free. And there can be no doubt that the sun-filled, yellowish waters know and take delight in their freedom. Anyone watching from the banks with their deep crevices where the river thrusts teasing, sinuous fingers, could tell this from his swirling, and splashing and rippling. At one turn in his swift course he leaps gleefully upon the sharp rocks as if to show by his mad abandon that he holds in a superior disdain even these steadfast, immovable obstructors.

And, as if not content with merely giving rein to his joyous satisfaction in this simple gayety of movement, the river sends out a murmuring proclamation of his free estate. For miles away on either side of the stream — up on the steep slopes whose noses rest by the riverside

and in the low flats that form among the hills — the voice of the rebel is heard. And to some upon whom the desolation and barrenness of the land spread a darkness over the heart, this voice and its gay teasing is like a glowing, soft light.

Everywhere else in that country a stern Nature is mistress. She is severe and repressive as one may judge from the warped and crippled trees, and the heaps of stone that strew the hillsides to keep the earth from protesting in her many tongues of defiant, tender grass. Like a mother who becomes harsh and oppressive for fear that her children may leave her in their growing strength and development, she has laid a cruel magic of inhibition on trees and grass, on flower and even on man.

Thomas was the exception. He was the exception in this as also in the very essence of his being. From the time his mother had hired him out to the Candles' he had quite forgotten her existence as he had long forgotten the lack of a father. Two beings, however, he did not forget: Snap, his short-tailed fox terrier whom he had saved from the rapids in the river, and the river himself. These two he loved with all the devotion of his inarticulate, insatiable yearning. Snap he would press to his heart with a crushing, impulsive hug, and to the river he spoke daily his love.

Every day he would steal down to the laughing, heedless stream and seat himself quietly beneath the berry bushes by the shore. Their ripe, juice-moist fruit dropped with a soft thud at intervals. As he sat there it seemed to him that the berries fell in tribute to the river.

At first he could not speak his own gratitude. Then slowly confidence won over his shyness and he would move lightly about, until one day his courage, like a warming juice within him, moved him to whistle. Gradually the halting, dry and frightened notes turned to a liquid, rippling sound, and that day he even advanced so far as to bend down to the river and with shy, hesitant

fingers touch the glancing waters. From the shadow of the overhanging bank an unsuspecting minnow moved out and nipped at his fingers. A thrill charged into the body of the boy. The river had answered him, had accepted his worship.

His visits to the river were his prayers. Therefore he smiled even when at work, and this it was, rather than anything he failed to do, which brought upon him the bitter, constant dislike of his master, Joel Candler.

Mr. Candler was thin and tall. His startled gray eyes had in them the sharp glints one sees in broken rocks. Year-long gazing on hard, barren hills had driven hardness into his eyes and had filled him with a bitterness against everything and everyone who was free and at peace with himself. He looked askance at Thomas.

But to Tom, his master's feelings were of little concern. He would watch Mr. Candler, thin and wiry of frame to gauntness, hard and gnarled of hands and face, with the same internal dissatisfaction as he looked upon the cancer-eaten trees about the square court back of the house. His disregard of his master's bitterness was part of his defense against the impelling, subversive control of nature round about. Looking at Mr. Candler, he would wonder: "Why doesn't he shake off his constant round of work, work, work all day long? Why doesn't he cut down these thin, gasping trees? Why doesn't he leave this place?" And there would form in Tom's mind sets of images in which pulsing waters ran through green-foliaged country such as he knew flourished beside his friend, the river.

And to make possible the bearing of his own burden as Mr. Candler's boy, he would take away from the river a strophe of the river's song. This lilt of freedom he sang in his own heart and now and again he would whistle it as a charm against the stilling desolation of the rocky fields he went to plough, or when he went to help harvest the poor, sickly crops.

"You there, Tom; stop that whistling, sir." Mr. Candler would command in the hurt voice of one helplessly enslaved and envious of him who speaks and breathes of freedom.

And Mrs. Candler, her face sapped white and her black hair in thick, tragic tresses forming a lustrous crown above a wasted glory, also resented the insidious, tantalizing call to freedom of Tom's blithe whistling. She had herself been light-hearted before she had come out to her husband's estate, years ago. Now she could not bear the sound of free laughter. She complained of Tom.

"What a queer boy. Always whistling, always smiling. Sometimes, Joel, I think that for all that he is only fourteen years, he's plotting against us! Look the way he watches Harold and David, like as he would want to do them harm."

II

Thomas was seated on the window sill of the window opening on the kitchen. He dipped the cloth into the pan of water by his side and brought it up against the pane. His eyes rested on the brilliant reflection of the river — a golden glow on the window — and instead of going on with his work, he dropped the cloth and turned half-way around so he could look more fully on his friend. Without half-trying he could catch the sound of the river's free murmur which rose above the trees and slopes and echoed on the panes.

Coming to him there on his perch this sound brought the obliteration of all intervening sounds and sights. The creaking of the wagon just coming up the road died away. The barren, low hills in front of him dropped from sight. Only the golden, moving surface of the river was before his eyes — like the strong, joyous body of one whom he loved and admired. In his ears were the enticing sounds of the river's persuasion.

David came upon him thus seemingly lost in some mys-

terious preoccupation, but actually attentive to an impelling message. David had begged off from washing the windows and could therefore indulge his fine wrath at finding Thomas delinquent in this distasteful task. Hurriedly and with the gossiping instinct of his thirteen years, David made off to his father. Mr. Candler was stacking hay in the barn, work in the performance of which he would have liked the assistance of Thomas. He strode rapidly to the place beneath the window ledge and called up:

"Damn it, Tom, it's coming so's yeh can't be trusted out o' sight for an instant. There y'are with lots o' work waiting, setting there and gaping. Just like that good for nothin' father of yours used to do. Go at it and finish those windows mighty quick now. You'll be needed for other work soon."

David, who had listened from behind the thick bole of a maple, laughed as he looked at the discomfort in Tom's eyes.

Tom resumed polishing the windows. In his mind were the echoing murmurs of the river. Carried on their continuous flow, however, was the recollection of the words Mr. Candler had yelled up at him: "Just like that good for nothin' father of yours used to do."

His father! Why couldn't he learn anything about him? He had no recollection of him whatever. Once, long before he had come to the Candlers, his mother had spoken of him. It was in a sudden outburst of secret thinking which she had repressed almost on the instant. But what she had said in that moment of moving remembrance had been sufficient to stir Tom's imagination.

Very clearly his mind painted for him the figure of a tall, blond-haired, strong-limbed man. He was young and active. He was courageous, for against the warnings of the river-men he would go swimming near the rapids. He was mysterious, thought Tom, for he would take long tramps in the woods by night and he would tell

unheard-of stories about impossible inhabitants of the woods. And he was strange — strange in his coming and as strange in his way of going.

He had come, no one knew from where; had gone, no one knew where. His golden, smiling ways had won for him the affection of many beside the river, in the small huddling huts against the trunks of the forest. Even to this day there was occasional mention of Tom Longthorpe.

Tom's brothers and sisters knew nothing or very little about Tom Longthorpe, and with good reason. They had disliked him, for their minds still bore the impression of their own father who had been killed by a falling tree. As for their mother they had as little thought of her as Tom had, for at an early age they too had been hired out to the farmers round about.

He was held back from further recollections by a few words that came to him from the kitchen. In the roomy interior where the big coal stove jutted far out from the wall, Lena was moving about. Her big body shook in her heavy-footed walking about the room. Tom remembered how even a short few months before, when he had first come, Lena had been lighter of foot, as her face had had more softness in it. At that time Tom felt himself drawn to her as if somehow he sensed in her a hatred of the life at the Clanders.

"That's a long trip for such a young boy," she was saying when Tom overheard.

"Yes, but Tom's got to be made to know he's here for work," Mrs. Candler's voice said from the pantry. "If he starts right soon he can drive to Luzon and back before night comes on. He'll have to hurry home what with those storm clouds off there."

Tom looked at the small, distant clouds. Storms had no terror for him nor for his dog, Snap. With Snap he had been through many storms. But that had been when the two were close to the river. What a soft, gray quiet

came over the river as if he too were becoming breathless before the great, invisible sweepings through the air. And then, when the lightning lashed out in the black sky and when the thunder broke loud upon the heads of the restless trees, what sudden animation seized upon the river! How he leaped in a thousand, sparkling waves to seize the pointed, playful fingers of the lightning! Then lightning and thunder and river joined in a gay boisterousness, and at once Snap and he would feel that they, too, were included in this fellowship of motion and high laughter. How often, even when he was much younger than now, had Tom leaped into the river — into the joyous singing waves to join with them in their glad revel! How gleeful his laughter had been when the lightning in dexterous quick stabs had seemed to spear the uplifted waves, close by, filling them with his sparkling, vigorous self!

But he had no desire to enter a storm anywhere on the long stretch of barren road. Even a glance over the road toward Luzon, from the hills near the house, filled him with dread. Barren fields where only stones grew; thin huddled trees with bodies that were starved and shrunk-en. Surely the lightning could find no delight here and the playful thunder no answering, mocking echo such as the river sent up in his laughter.

Unseen of anyone, Thomas stole down from the window. He was glad he had overheard Lena and Mrs. Candler. So far that day he had not been able to go down to the river. He knew that if he started off on the trip to Luzon without first paying his visit, he should be unable to go down all that day. The desire to visit the river, to lie down on the cool moss by his side and speak out all the dissatisfied yearnings he carried, was warm within him, and he started off.

The way to the river led across a group of hills, each lower than the one preceding. From the topmost hill, that on which he was standing, Tom looked down. A

barren field stretched before him. A bare, rock-filled valley brought home sharply the sense of desolation which filled the country. As his eyes sought out the flashing river, he saw again the sight that both puzzled and pleased him. The closer the road drew to the river, the greener became the countryside. The lowest hills seemed to have been caught up in a green joy. Their trees, proudly foliated, gazed back upon the barren country that rolled to their feet, with a look both haughty and pitying. And every now and then, filled with the glad knowledge of their strength and of the good will the river bore them, the trees stirred their glancing leaves and dropped rustling praises of the river upon the road and the fields about them.

Now Tom entered a stretch of road underneath these whispering trees. There fell from him the discontent that had filled him. A lightness came into him as if on the air which he breathed and the sounds and fresh odors of the woods which he took into himself. A sting of joy pierced his heart and suddenly there gushed from his lips a gay, rapid whistling as if to announce to the river that he was coming. He pushed his way through some bushes. Red and purple berries, with here and there loosened blackberries, shook down upon him. He laughed aloud as he caught and ate some of the berries, letting their moist perfumes suffuse his mouth.

And then he stood by the riverside. With joyous eyes he gazed upon his cheerful, gay-hearted friend.

"I have come," he announced, and the river's myriad sun-dimples blinked him welcome. It seemed to him that a softness came into the voice of the river.

He stopped to sit down at his favorite place. But he was filled with a sweet unrest that carried him about. It was as if by his great closeness to the river's heart his own had filled with a soft, impelling motion — as if he had himself become one of the clear, sun-flashing waves. On he walked lightly, easily, clinging with joyous clasp

to the branches that bent down to the river, to the strong, healthy bushes that thrust their arms protectingly above the flowing water. Unconsciously he hastened his movements. He was out of breath and his gay laughter clung to his lips. To rest himself he stretched out on a grass plot and listened.

The river lulled his senses and he felt himself taken into arms that loved and caressed him. Soon he lost the sense of the river's words and felt only that it was good — good and warming within — to be thus caressed and soothed.

When he looked up again it was with the startled feeling that hours had passed, that he had been locked in the arms of an enchantment which still lingered in his heart like a perfume that was lifting off.

Close beside him, circling slowly and magnificently above a flat, golden rock in a shallow, was a full-bodied, gleaming fish. Up it cruised and around, a light turn of its fin directing its graceful motion. Back and forth it sailed, never beyond the limits of the flat stone, never hurrying. And now again he could hear the river's speech: "You are going far; take me — a thought of me — with you."

Remembrance of his journey leaped into his mind. Why, yes, he had come to visit the river, to give him greeting. And the river offered of himself so he would not be without cheer on the joyless trip. He looked about him on the bank. He spied and seized a large can underneath a bush. He stepped to the water's edge. He stooped and his long, thin hand, reaching into the water, took on a golden clarity that was almost translucent. Gracefully and without a turn, the fish sailed to him. His hand closing on it, felt a fluttering and tremble. His heart stood still and his lips were open and wordless.

He dipped the can into the water and the river ran eagerly into it with a gurgling laughter.

Thomas could not speak. He could not whistle the

gratitude that flooded his heart. He could only gaze with bright, thankful eyes upon the fish that circled in the water-filled vessel he carried.

Carefully he made his way to the barn. He found the horse and wagon waiting. Unnoticed he placed the can underneath the seat and started toward the house.

"Tom, there you are. Where in thunder have you been all this time, sir?" Mr. Candler's voice and words halted him abruptly. "You jump into that wagon right smart, see. And you leave Snap behind this trip. No loitering now if you mean to be back before the storm catches us. You won't have to spend much time in Luzon. Just take the stuff from Lester Coates and start right back."

Tom needed no other urging. He leaped to the seat and was off.

III

Silence, gray and dismal, walled the road on either side. It was like an invisible fog, dull and palpable only to the inner senses. It opened before Tom's advance and he was vaguely conscious that it closed heavily back of him as he drove on.

A liquid flap and the flirt of a fin brought him to himself. He drew the vessel from under his seat and the warmth of reassurance flowed into his veins. Here, with him on this very journey, was the river—the river's goodness and joyousness, the river's warm message.

Above the steady hoof-beats on the stony road Tom heard the gentle swishing of the restless fins. And because his eyes were intent on the quick, silver flashing of the speckled sides, and because his ears were sharp for the sound of the river's faithful words, he thought himself close beside the river although the road was steadily spinning out behind him.

To the right of the road the red earth crawled down a slope and away to a far, stone dotted valley. Deep scars

on its flanks made the earth seem like a gigantic, bruised body. Thin wisps of trees strained upward to have their frail plumage tugged at by vagrant, unfriendly winds. The gray, storm-hinting sky settled down — descending lower and lower with a crashing insistence.

To the left ragged ridges lifted lean, tortured flanks as if in the defiance of despair.

Out of the corner of his eyes Tom took in these changing yet constant vistas. As if ready to leap in assault upon his heart and mind there lurked on either side of him the dismal, gray loneliness, the heavy melancholy of barrenness that were the air and breath of the country. He kept them off by fastening his eyes on the gay flashes that issued from the vessel.

He hardly heard a sudden calling directed at him. "Hold there! Back!"

But the sudden commotion and frightened plashing in the can, and the sharp splintering of one of the wagon shafts at the abrupt halting of the horse, made him look up.

"Whoa, whoa!" A man leaped from a wagon in front of him. The wagon's side was battered. The vehicle had been almost hurled off the side road along which it had been going.

"Wall, it's as I thought. You're Candler's boy, Tom, ain't you? Thought as I reckonized you by your sittin' there so queer. That's a fine way to be going along the main pike, ain't it?"

No answer from Tom. What could he say? Would talking undo the damage? Would it serve to hide from Mr. Candler the fact that a shaft was broken or that he had broken the wagon of the farmer?

Tom thought he recognized the man. "Which place you be going to?" he asked as if hoping this question would hurry the man on his way.

"I'm going up the Candler way. I'm coming with a load of stuff from Coates back Luzon way. He thought

Mr. Candler'd be too busy to send over for them casks and boxes, an' so he asked me to bring these things over. An' can't you be looking where you're goin'? Yuh almost smashed me up pretty complete this time — you sittin' and lookin' down a'tween your knees."

The man approached Tom's wagon and even before Tom could look up to shout him off, the man called out:

"Eh, what's that you've got down there? As I'm a human man, if it ain't a live fish! Say, where do you be getting live fishes all the way top o' these yere hills? Mm," as if to convey profound understanding. "They do say as how you've got kind of a nearness to the river down yonder."

The man reached over as if to touch the fish. Rage and fear filled Tom. "Back from there," he yelled. "Get away from here," and he leaped up from his seat as if to fling himself upon the man.

Rude Collins hastened away in silence. There was no asking of questions, he saw, and he looked angrily and with suspicion at Tom. But Tom was busy at the splintered shaft. He found a piece of heavy twine and with this he was fastening the broken pole. But busied as he was he was still atremble with the fear that had impassioned him against his questioner. That man had come close and had spied on his secret — had come near to laying a hand on this gift from his great and joyous comrade! And now he once more lost himself in the pleasant, ensnaring thoughts of the river, and mounting to the seat turned the horse around and again was intent on the gay, eager twistings and bright, colorful movements of the river creature so dear to him.

And if he had had any fears as to what Mr. Candler might say or do when he heard of the disaster to the shaft, or if he had had any disturbing thoughts because of the discovery of his secret by the man who was driving rapidly in front of him, Tom seemed to have lost these thoughts and fears completely. The storm was in his

mind, and the river, and the thought of the river's warm generosity to him.

That night, if the storm came (and in his heart the wish grew strong that the storm would come) — he would go down to the river. With Snap for companion he would go and bring the river his thanks and heart-felt gratitude. Nor would he forget to bring back the eager, beautiful companion of his journey.

Mr. Candler was waiting atop the hill, beside the house. This circumstance in itself was suspicious, for Tom knew that nothing good could keep Mr. Candler from the endless tasks which always needed doing. What was more suspicious was the presence, beside Mr. Candler, of the master's wife and the two boys. Near the group, waiting with an air of knowing satisfaction, was the farmer into whose wagon Tom had crashed.

Even before Tom took the last upward turn leading to the top of the hill, Mr. Candler detached himself from the group and came charging down. And from back of some bushes where he had been hidden from view, Snap leaped forward and came bounding toward Tom with shrill, happy barks.

There was little time for Tom to notice Snap, for the angry voice of Mr. Candler assailed his ears and caused him to pull up short.

"What sort 'a carryings on are these, I hear about you?" Mr. Candler roared, and his hands and body swung as he hurried down the sloping ground. "What do you think I want you to do when I send you out on an errand, hey? It's not enough you're slow and obstinate; you go smashing into other people so's I must spend extra money on you." And now Mr. Candler was right beside the wagon. He looked in at the foot-board and saw the can he was looking for and the gleaming fish swimming about.

"So here's what's been keeping you! And here's what's costing me money to Rude Collins." Mr. Candler

reached into the wagon and seized the can. At once Tom leaped up from his seat.

"Leggo, let go, don't touch that!" he yelled and caught Mr. Candler's hasty arm.

But Mr. Candler was not to be stopped. He thrust his left hand into Tom's face and with the right he lifted the can out of the wagon. He drew away and swinging his arm with all the wiry strength of his taut muscles, cast it from him. A spray of water sparkled in the air and then a silver flash shot up and fell glimmering into a clump of bushes.

Tom was out of the wagon. He started towards the bushes. Mr. Candler's swinging arm caught him on the shoulder.

"You get right into the wagon, young man," Mr. Candler said. He turned Tom about. The others had walked down so that now they were close by. "Into the wagon and drive into the barn, do you hear?"

"No, I won't. I won't. You had no right throwing my fish away. I won't go."

Mr. Candler waited no longer. His face white with uncontrollable anger, he brought his fist down on Tom's face. Again he lifted his hand and this time with outstretched fingers he struck Tom across the eyes and nose.

Tom fell to the ground. Confusion was in his mind and filled his eyes. Resentment was in his feelings for he had heard the laughter of the boys as he fell. From this he was being slowly drawn by the warm, lapping tongue of Snap whose little body clung close to Tom. Then he heard Mr. Candler's shouted words: "Get away there, Snap." He heard Snap's shrill, painful outcry as the dog was flung away by a kick.

IV

Tom was awakened by a clap of thunder. He turned his head in the darkness of the barn and then sat up alert. The drumming fingers of the rain thudded firmly

on the roof above him. A moisture that was laden with sweetness seemed to float all about him, and the straw on which he had been sleeping exhaled a fresh odor.

He stretched with a filling sense of enjoyment and then sprang up quickly. A flash of lightning sent tiny spears of light through the cracks of the roof, revealing the stout cross beams. Instantly he recalled his resolve. The storm had come at last. Now he would go to the river, yes, and he would make his escape too. He would no longer stay at the Candler's. That had been the decision which came to him out of the confusion when he had been struck down by Mr. Candler. He recalled with a shudder how he had picked himself up and how he had driven into the barn. Anger and pain had filled him that night when he stole down to the clump of bushes; the gay, beautiful companion of his journey was dead.

He sprang down to the floor of the barn. How glad he was now that his resentment had made him go to sleep in the barn rather than to the place set aside for him in the main house. He made his way in the darkness to the door and swung open the wooden cross-bar. Then he stepped out.

What a sky! How it was being gashed and seared by the white lightnings! What deep-throated thunders roared out of the unfathomable black! And what close-clinging, drenching, friendly torrents were pouring down. He glanced up delightedly and breathed hard. He stood against the trembling walls of the barn and looked about.

The thin, sickly trees were struggling in the wind. Their terrified sighing and swaying came to his ears. For a moment before starting he thought of Snap. How could he get his dog?

He thought of making his way into the main house, where, behind the staircase, he knew he would find Snap. But it struck him that to do this would lead to his detection.

He moved out into the open, away from the walls of the

barn. The wind seized the heavy barn-door and with a great crash swung it hard against the door post.

And now he was once more on the road leading down to the river. A runnel by the side, bubbling and foaming with the heavy inrush of rain from the stony flanks of the hills along the road, became for him a companion in the night. The rivulet gurgled and brawled; it spread into a seething delta over the soil that covered the knuckled roots of a wayside tree. He stuck his toes into the water, taking delight in the feel of the sand and in the flooding force of the stream. He squeezed his wringing knickerbockers so that a stream of water poured along his thin legs and into the brooklet. Then on he sped, stopping to hear the wind in the crying trees and to watch the whips of lightning strike out in the dark. The rain splashed on his hair and ran down his face. He attempted to whistle but the rain ringed his lips and he could not fashion a sound. He laughed and took to running. He leaped into pools that formed in the middle of the road, and once slipped, but saved himself from a dangerous fall by thrusting before him his quick, joyful hands. His laughter burst into the night and preceded him.

The roaring of the river was in his ears. Never before had he heard such a tumult. And now, as he stood on the last hill the slope of which led right down to the water's edge, by the flashes of lightning he saw that the river was a mass of wild, clashing waves. He heard a churning in the crevices and a washing against the bank. The reeds and bushes by the riverside were filled with a movement he had never seen before. For a moment he felt a chill run through his body.

Eagerly he slipped and tore through the restraining, clinging wet bushes. The desire which overcame him to touch, to plunge into these turbulent waves, to have himself flung about by the playful buffeting waters, was like a pulsing flood. On the instant he was stripped free of

all his ragged, wet garments. A burst of lightning revealed to him the overhanging, low branches of a tree and he seized upon these and let himself into the water.

It was warm with rain. It was loud with the turbulence of wind and thunder. But to him it was caressing, like eager soft hands that reached up to stroke his body.

When he let go the branch he felt that at last he had come back to his friend. Now he was being lifted up and tossed about, joyously, as if he were carried on the exultant shoulders of friends. It was not hard to keep afloat and when the lightning flashes broke near him and he saw the foaming crests of waves he lunged at them with joy. At once he was free and felt himself far from the tortures he had suffered during the day. He was being cleansed like an uprooted, small tree the roots of which yet retain clinging particles of earth to give them up only in the milling rush of water.

V

How the river grew quiet Thomas did not know. But when he awoke he saw that once again the flowing surface was smooth gold where the rays of the morning sun trod upon it. And the overhanging trees and foliage on the bank opposite shone green.

He, too, stretched on a soggy bank the grasses of which were moist and a-quiver, felt himself filled with sun and translucent. He had slept from fatigue and now an energy of playfulness was in his body and he kicked up his legs, watching the easy movement of muscle. It was his nearness to the river speaking in his every move and thought. It was as if he had been released from a clamp and as if now he had again discovered the fine flexibility of his body.

He arose, and still keeping close to the side of the river, made his way in the direction of his mother's hut. There he would find clothing and from there he would start out on his life of freedom. For the first time in all the months

since he had been at the Candlers' he thought of her. And because there was joy within him and because the singing of the river was in his ears, his thoughts were kindly. He felt that he should like to come close to her as he knew himself close to everything he loved. He grasped the bushes and green branches with an eager clutch, delighting in their firmness and supple bending.

A stirring in a cornfield stopped him. He had reached an open stretch along the river not far from the rapids. He stood in the sunlight, his body glistening white except for his arms and legs which showed brown.

A man in the corn-patch yelled to him, "Hey, there, Tom Longthorpe. You back? Where've you been all these years?"

Tom heard himself thus addressed in wonder. He did not know the voice and now, as the speaker approached, he did not recognize him.

But the next words explained the man's mistake.

"Wal, I'll be knocked loco. Say, you look just like your pop. You're Tom Longthorpe's son, ain't you? Where ye been keepin'? Yer up at Candlers', ain't you? Wal, and where be ye goin' now?"

Tom was not inclined to speak. He grunted in answer and strode by. But his mind was a-quiver with pleasurable thoughts. So he was like his father? And did he look so much like him as to be mistaken for him? All the vivid imaginings he had spun about his own picture of his father came to his mind and delighted him. The feeling that he was in his own element, which had come to him on his approach to the river, now coursed full in his veins. It made him keen to recognize all the familiar landscape and the trees whose trunks he had brushed in his play. It seemed just yesterday. He whistled lightly, attempting to lure into song the birds flying just over him.

In this spirit he stepped suddenly into the clearing where stood the gray, weather-worn hut where he had

been born. Against the living green of the forest it stood, worn and aged in the sun. It seemed to be falling apart under the weight of the sunlight.

But Tom was all joy and vigor. His voice sped over the clearing like a gleaming bird.

"Oh, mother, mother, I'm back," he shouted.

From her washing Tom's mother walked to the open doorway.

"What for y' yell like that? What for ye come down yere? Why ain't yer up to the big house where ye belongs?"

"I ain't goin' up there no more," said Tom. "I've broke off from there."

"Wal, y'ain't gonna hang around yere. Ah'm not gonna put up with no good for nothin' runnin' round my place. Ye just better'n go on back to the big house 'stead o' runnin' round crazy like your father."

At any other time such a greeting from his mother might have subdued and halted Thomas. But now there was flowing within him a current of joyous freedom that would yield to nothing, nor stop at any obstruction. This spirit found voice in a vigorous shrill whistling as Tom went into the hut. He moved to a gray corner, to a heap of rags. He stooped in the gray light and began a search for cast-off clothing which he might make for his own.

He had quite forgotten his mother's yelling and rebuke; he had even forgotten her mention of Mr. Candler, to whom, as she threatened, she would go and report his presence at the hut. He was steeped in sunny plans of his own. There was to be a pleasant, undisturbed lifetime along the river. That very day he was going to start up the course of the river. He would follow it to its roots in the mountains and there he would live, out of sight and mind of Mr. Candler and the Candler boys. He would make himself a bateau, such as, he had heard, was owned by his father. In it he would come down the river when he wanted to; he would pole down and trail

his fishing lines. But always, always he would live within sight and sound of the river. Always he would be close to this great, forceful companion along whose cheerful banks there were green trees filled with bird-song and bushes jewelled with bright, juicy, perfumed berries. If only Snap were here — Snap whose shrill barking was a minor song of freedom.

Then he became suddenly aware of Snap's barking. And he came gradually to hear voices — yes, there was Mr. Candler's voice and now his mother's. He heard Mr. Candler:

"I came down here for him. This dog, here, took me down to the river and past Aaron's corn-field. Now look here, if he don't come back to my place I will make you pay for the damage to Rude Collins' wagon which Tom did."

"Go in there and take him. I told him I'd let you know as he was yere to my place. Take him, I say."

Tom did not stop to hear the rest of the talk. He did not revile himself for having failed to think of the danger to himself in this visit to his mother's house. Now dressed in a pair of old trousers and in a ragged shirt he made his way to the window farthest from the speakers. He dropped lightly to the grass and was off.

Snap's happy barking burst suddenly into the air. Instantly Mr. Candler was on that side of the house and as quickly was in full pursuit of Tom.

"Stop! Tom, you stop where you are!"

To give weight to his command, Mr. Candler stooped, seized a stone and hurled it at Tom. It struck him in the small of the back and stopped him. In heavy sullenness he preceded Mr. Candler in their walk to the Candler farm.

And now once more Thomas was fighting, but this time without the encouragement of the river's bright, invigorating message. It was the fight against the forces that held Mr. Candler in leash; against the powers that

thinned the men of the district, thinned and whitened or swallowed the women; laid relentless pressure upon the frightened trees; shrivelled and brought low the berry-bushes of the countryside, unlike those which, in more favored patches close to the river, stood high to flash their red and purple jewels in the sun.

He was fighting against being made part of the restless retinue — his master, Mrs. Candler, David, Harold, Lena — that from daybreak to the dark purple of the sun's after-glow pursued an endless round of exacting, barren duties.

But his fight was without joy, for not only was he forbidden to go to the river, but his every move was watched. This came when Mr. Candler, determined that his estate should be made to pay, decided that every minute should be made to count and that the energy of everyone on the estate should contribute to this ultimate end.

Mr. Candler did not spare himself. From the first streak of dawn which thrust feeble fingers over the barren mountains to long after the moon was up, he was on the tread-mill of duties that enveloped the household. Wiry and desperate, he was back of the plow; he was by the side of the cows that were strangely stricken with disease; he was hammering at the barn-door where a rusty hinge threatened to drop it; he was spraying the feeble trees in the orchard. Back of him always was the household: Mrs. Candler driving to market, buying a scythe, having the harness repaired, selling eggs, buying seed; Lena, cooking and growing thin; mending and growing sour; Harold and David, caring after the hogs and growing hollow-chested and pale; and Thomas at the beck and call of his master and of Mrs. Candler and of Lena and of Harold and David.

Thomas was morose. He was silent. His cheeks were like thin unhealthy leather. His eyes, once used to the radiant sight of moon and stars and river, were shadowy and fearful. The laughter which used to speak his defi-

ance of the Candler boys and of his master had given way to an angry profanity which found metaphors in the filth of his surroundings. And instead of the bright, confident whistling with which he used to defy the desolate, stony fields, a stealthy, frightened silence was in his steps and movements when he went out into the meadows and into the fields.

Mr. Candler praised him. He commended him on the marked change in his manner and behavior. There was no more need for watching him — he was doing his work well.

One day all was different. There was such a weight of heat that no work was possible. Not a branch stirred and no wheels turned. What it was that made Mr. Candler think of the river Thomas did not know, but even his master's decision that they should all go down there, brought no joy to him.

By the cool side of the river they all found rest. All but Thomas. At first he felt within himself an even, slumbering curiosity toward the river, — a placid remoteness which permitted him to study the opposite shore and the moving stream with calm, unyielding eyes. A coolness was in his heart and a motionless calm through which the river moved without stirring him.

He walked along the bank. There, a little below and across was the cornfield where he had been taken for his father. Strange that the words of the farmer should swim into his mind at this time. "Hey, there, Tom Longthorpe, you back?" He had quite forgotten the words until this moment.

Calmly he walked on. But not so calmly as before. He did not like to come upon bends and turns, river cuts and scenes that threatened at any moment of revealing familiarity to tear down the remoteness about his heart. Yet he continued, the ground under his feet drawing him on.

He stopped suddenly and of himself. He dared not move forward. There, before him in a shallow was the

flat, golden rock. With a pain that pulsed and stabbed through him he remembered the day, the very moment, when the river had offered of himself to be companion of his journey. Again he saw the magnificent slow circling of the fish, gleaming and full-bodied. He put his hand to his eyes to shut out the picture.

He turned about and started back to where the others rested. In his haste he could hear clearly the rapid humming and murmur of the river. There was torment in the sound that seemed to embrace him, and now there was a flowing pain within him — circling and tingling in his heart, flooding his whole being.

He stretched out on a moist, cool plot of grass, but he could not rest. His eyes turned to the river. There was no calm in them, but only a yearning — a frightened longing. It seemed he could hear, close by, the soft thud of falling berries. He shifted from one side to the other. There were the constant, endless murmurs from the river — weaving confusion, weaving a sounding reproach which he could not silence.

That night Thomas was beside the river when the moon moved up into the sky. He saw how serenely she slipped out of reach of the straining branches by the side of the stream and looked down on the hills and valley.

Now his eyes were on the river and grasped the whole of its quivering, black-streaked surface. His ears were filled with its murmur as of silver striking silver. A great fatigue was upon him, a fatigue of tumult within, and made him limp.

The river would heal him of the hurt he felt. The river with his great calm, his old friendliness would take him. He did not see the branches held out to him by the neighboring trees. Only one thing he saw clearly. It was the moon-road on the water beckoning to him in a thousand broken dimples. He sought to shake free of his fatigue as he stepped into the water.

Next morning they missed him at the colonial house on the hill. But his body was found on the bank of the river.

TWO POEMS

By K. K. FOSTER

A FOUNTAIN PIECE

Wistful your drooped lids and changing lips
And the curve of your throat — a reed bending
When wind slips light-fingered down the ground,
Your body firm under your flowing dress,
Delicate flower breasts; — and pliant arms extending,
In them a bowl where the grey rain drips
All of the summer day without a sound.
Kneeling beside you I touch a blowing tress,
— And know your brown lithe body made of stone.

TO MY COMPANION

September, 1921

All the brown crossroads we have left behind,
And the jolly men and boys
(Some bold, some shy,)
That made a road or drove a cart,
And housewives standing at the door
Mute, a picture of surprise,
Lifting in dismay their hands,
While from behind an elm tree
Close and sheltered from the heat,
Bright haired children rose to see
Two vagabonds go by,
On beyond the straight farm lands
To the hills, and far.

And sorry tears fall in my mind
Such beauty lived before our eyes
To have no share in any more
But be remembered part by part
And hung like woodcuts on a wall.

And there will be no little wind
Sing "You are young. You were old."
No twilit stream of water blowing
Like a breeze over a field of wheat,
And in the late grey evening showing,
Tangled among black reeds, a star,
In that deep shadow where we would dip
To make our bodies clean and cold,
Then lie with finger on our lip
(As if a trifle we had sinned)
Hearing birds call.

All the brown crossroads we have left behind
And tears fall in my mind.

MINNIE

By LOCKIE PARKER

Early one morning Minnie's man threw her out of the cabin on Vinegar Hill where they had lived together for some time past. Minnie fell heavily on the ground and cut her cheek on a stone. She heard the door shut and locked behind her and lay there a moment, perhaps thinking. Then she rose and muttering to herself went slowly down the hill.

Vinegar Hill lies across the railroad track from the town, near the shaft of the coal mine. It is one mass of corruption, according to the evangelists. In appearance, it is a medium-sized clay hill, marred by rows of drab, wooden shacks, set at curious angles to each other and at irregular distances along the muddy paths,—paths that cross and twist and begin and end in a manner as hopelessly incomprehensible to the white man as the workings of the negro mind. Beside the shacks, there is the coal company's store, stocked with all the uncomely

necessities of life, and the freight depot and a shunt where the night freight shoves the coal cars with the shrill squeak of metal on metal and the bumping clang of couplings.

On this particular morning, it was raining on Vinegar Hill, a November drizzle that washed the last vestige of color from the landscape. Nobody was about. The day was too ugly.

Minnie looked back once, as she crossed the railroad track, and shook her fist at the place. Then she shuffled on, limping slightly and still muttering, until she approached a square, brick house on the opposite side of town. Before entering the yard, she stopped, brushed some of the mud from her skirt and adjusted her damp, torn clothing as best she could.

The back door was opened by a tall, yellow negress in a clean, starched gingham dress. "We don't want no tramps here," she said loudly.

"I ain't askin' what a po' thing like you wants. I come to see Miss Agnes, if she ain' dead yet with yo' cookin'," Minnie retorted with confidence and took a step forward.

"Yo' ain't fit to come in. I just scrubbed my kitchen." The other stood determinedly in the door.

"What is the trouble, Rosie?" a brisk voice asked, and a plump, capable, white woman of fifty appeared at the door.

The yellow negress fell back, repeating stubbornly, "She ain't comin' in here, Miss Agnes, — she ain't comin' in here."

"Oh, it's you, Minnie. Well?"

"I want to come back, Miss Agnes. I ain't goin' to have nothin' to do with that nigger any more."

"I'm sorry, Minnie, but you know I took you back twice, and the last time you left me when I had a house full of company. I said then that you need not come back."

"Yessum, but this time he's through with me, too. I got to get work, Miss Agnes."

"Then you must hunt another place. You need the lesson, Minnie. I've been too easy on you. Besides, it would not be fair to turn Rosie away now. I absolutely can't use you."

Minnie sighed and gazed wistfully at the big, warm, familiar kitchen behind the obdurate woman in the door. She thought of succulent dishes and the odors of her own cooking and her voice yearned.

"If yo' should change yo' mind, Miss Agnes —"

"I shall *not* change my mind. Do you understand, Minnie?"

"Yessum." Minnie turned drearily away.

The drizzle was thickening and a wind was rising that blew the cold drops in her face and against her body, soaking her clothing. Minnie went doggedly from door to door. People stared and said *No!* abruptly. Sometimes, jeering white folks' niggers shut the door in her face.

Presently she came to a white house among some maples, the pretty, little house that Catherine Halliday's husband had built her before he ran away with the other woman. Catherine Halliday answered the door herself. She saw an immense bulk so black that one could conclude nothing about its cleanliness, sodden rags and shoes that looked like something that should have been buried long ago. From this formless, shivering mass, there looked forth two nakedly helpless, tragically imploring eyes. Then a mournful voice raised its soft minor above the spatter of the freezing rain and asked, "Have yo' got any kind of work yo' reckon I could do?"

People of certain temperaments can not hurt shell-less, passive things; and Catherine, although she shuddered, could not close the door with Minnie on the outside. She let her in and asked her to sit down. Then she looked at her with dismay. Minnie bulged above and about the

hard, wooden chair, absorbing at every pore the warmth and smells of the kitchen. Her clothing dripped little streams of muddy water on the blue and white linoleum.

"I think I'd like it here," she said softly, exuding satisfaction. "Can I cook dinner?"

"Why — why —" said Catherine. "I don't know."

She never *did* know quite how or why it happened that that night they had a sort of dreamland dinner of melting biscuit, candied yams, delicately browned lamb with a flavor, potatoes whipped to a froth, and a chocolate meringue pie so thick and yet so ethereal that one sighed when it was past.

Then, two days later, four year old Timmy came down with a fever and Minnie nursed him tirelessly night after night. He took his medicine from her hand more readily than from his mother's, and it was most often when Minnie sat by his bed, patting his hand and crooning to him, that his restless little body became still and he would fall asleep. After that, it was a question whether she was more devoted to the family or the family to her.

To Catherine, quite overcome by the undivided responsibility of a home and three small children, Minnie appeared as a necessary and invaluable and, above all, *solid* support, provided in the nick of time by that watchful Providence, who had been quite uniformly regardful of Catherine except in the matter of a husband. The two women were friends in that peculiarly deep intimacy of mistress and maid whose trials and problems are the same. They discussed together when Robert should take off his woollens, and whether to call the doctor when Timmy coughed or just let Minnie rub his chest with goose grease. There were confidential moments when their talk ranged on deeper subjects and they found themselves agreed on all essentials: they believed God took care of them somehow, that men were always cruel and untrustworthy, that one should put the needs of children before everything else, that Catherine's children were

particularly darling, and that Catherine should never marry Mr. Pate, her faithful admirer of many years.

But one day trouble appeared. Minnie's man had noticed her growing comfort and prosperity and was annoyed by it. His friends taunted him with it; so he appeared one morning in the pretty blue and white kitchen and asserted himself. Minnie, beaten and reviled and threatened, made no stand at all against this whirling fury of half her size. She followed him with scarcely an audible protest. The event was violent but brief. He was as swift and certain, as vicious and unprotestable as a stroke of lightning. Catherine, from across the kitchen, saw swift, lithe arms and legs, jet black eyes in a yellow face, a foppish moustache, and lips that drew back scornfully from two rows of handsome, white teeth.

In a few days Minnie returned. But, at intervals of a few weeks or months, the incident was unfailingly repeated. The man would swagger insolently into the kitchen some morning, his eyes aglow with excitement, and drag Minnie out in the most offensive way he could devise, not because he wanted her — he never kept her — but because that was his mood at the moment. After each occasion, Minnie returned more limp and sore and depressed. A black cloud of gloom filled the kitchen. Misery, plague, and unnamed misfortunes seemed to hang in the air and were hinted at darkly.

One day the two women were talking it over. Finally Catherine said with considerable firmness, "Minnie, you've been unwilling to listen to reason on this subject long enough. I can't have this going on indefinitely. The next time, for the sake of the children and myself as well as for your own good, I am positively going to appeal to the police."

There was a choking gurgle of terror, followed by a heavy thump, as Minnie flung herself at Catherine's feet and, clinging to her skirt, implored her. "For God's sake, Miss Catherine, — for the sake of the little Je-

sus —" she stammered. Then suddenly she was still, frozenly still and staring. "That nigger would kill me," she whispered.

Catherine shivered involuntarily and tried to draw her skirt away, but Minnie clutched it frantically. "Promise me, Miss Catherine, — for the love of heaven, promise."

Catherine frowned. "Very well," she said severely. "But you try my patience, Minnie. If you would only make *any* kind of stand against him, — or show some spirit." She jerked her skirt away from Minnie's hold.

Minnie sat back upon her enormous haunches and looked at her mistress with big, soft, unresentful eyes. "Miss Catherine," she asked soberly, "did you ever wish you'd a died when you was a baby?"

There was a dead pause. Catherine stared.

"How awful you are!" she almost shrieked, all the willful optimism of her race revolted by this sombre yielding to hostile circumstance.

Minnie shook her head. "That man will be my death," she murmured and her voice sank lower and lower but was still distinct, as she went on passionlessly, "that man or another, — trouble — trouble, — my death, body and soul."

Catherine fled from the room, almost with her hands in her ears. The thing appalled her like an abyss suddenly opened at her feet. She was miserable all the morning. To simply flee from such despondency seemed intolerably cruel and unfeeling, and yet she shrank sickeningly from another encounter with it. The struggle tried her soul, but her devotion to Minnie triumphed. Toward noon she approached the kitchen, pale, with a sort of exalted resolution written large on her face. She opened the door and paused.

The kitchen was mellow with warmth and more than usually fragrant — spices, roast meat, and the pleasant odor of fruits stewing. The dinner promised to be a masterpiece. Minnie was singing:

"Mmmm! I wish I was in heb'n
Sittin' down, sittin' down,
Wid old Saint Peter a handin' me
A crown, a crown.
Oh, it makes no difference where I may be —
In Alabam' or Tennessee, —
I wish I was in heb'n
Sittin' down."

Catherine withdrew stealthily. The world seemed a trifle hollow. She was glad Minnie felt better, but she was rather short with her all the rest of that week.

Then on Sunday Minnie's husband got badly cut up in a razor battle over a disputed crap game, and died. Minnie's behavior on this occasion was interesting. She mortgaged her future to give him an expensive funeral, indulged in heart-breaking lamentations, and wore mourning of such a depth that, with her God-given complexion, it made her conspicuous even on the darkest night. Catherine gathered vaguely that Minnie was exorcising the man's spirit lest it haunt her. She would have been indulgent to even more elaborate extravagances, now that Minnie promised to be hers uninterruptedly, and she was much reassured by the renewal of Minnie's vows never again to have dealings with any man on this earth.

Yet, for some obscure reason, Minnie's spirit was still not at rest. Her periodic fits of gloom continued, though the ostensible cause was removed, and she grew increasingly restless. One day she announced to Catherine that she was going to join a friend up North, a fabulous land where wages were enormous and colored people were treated as the cream of society. Catherine remonstrated with reproaches and tears, then loaned her ten dollars and bought her a heavy coat. She received one post card, written from the Union Station in St. Louis. Minnie said that this gorgeous building with its *million* lights made her think of paradise.

One January day, several years later, Catherine Halliday was sitting by the fire in her living room, trying to read a novel Mr. Pate had sent her. The children had just gone back to school and college after the Christmas vacation, and she was feeling rather bleak and lonely. There was a knock at the door and she found Minnie on the doorstep. They looked at each other with kindly interest. Catherine had become gently elderly, her hair had whitened, and her face was marked by many fine lines. Minnie looked almost the same as the November morning when she had come down from Vinegar Hill;—negroes age very slowly.

As they sat by the fire, they talked first of the children: how tall Robert was, how well Timmy was doing at school, and what a pretty young girl Catherine had become. The mother showed photographs and snapshots of all of them.

"But oh, Minnie!" she said. "How I miss them when they are away!"

"Yessum. It is lonesome, I s'pose. And you never married Mr. Pate?"

"No, Minnie. You know I made up my mind about that years ago."

"Yessum." Minnie's tone was pensive.

They were silent. Minnie sighed and presently took off her glove and showed Catherine a wedding ring.

"Why, Minnie!" exclaimed Catherine. "Why in the world? You're the last person on earth— Why, you've told me I don't know how many times that you would never,—under any circumstances,—consider such a thing. Oh, I don't see how you could really,—after everything. Is he good to you?"

"Yessum," said Minnie meekly. She put her glove back on and added regretfully, "He was. He's left me now."

"There! what did you expect?" cried Catherine, her indignation rising. "Minnie, how on earth did you come to do it?"

Minnie looked out of the window. The wind was whirling the snow into strange shapes that spun and danced like demons; ever and again the directing wind whistled shrilly, and they danced yet more swiftly and madly. She drew closer to the fire with a still satisfaction.

"I don't know, Miss Catherine,—” It was a slow phrase, diminuendo,— of one who neither comprehends nor resists. "I don't know why I did it." The black bulk of flesh drew nearer the flames and her voice was pitched at its lowest and most musical. "I don't know, but it's so cold up North and the days are kind of short,— it was a winter evenin'— dark — and snow — and cold —” she shivered slightly. "We was humpin' over the fire together, and the wind howlin' round sort o' lonesome — and — and — he — *asked* me."

TWO POEMS

By ORA R. MOHN

MYSTIC

Arabic stallion:
Carnate statue
Poised in the night-time!

Distending velvet
Quivering to the message
Of the keen night air!

Swift ears straining
To the pregnant code
Of a far away foot-fall!

ECHOES

Ah . . . did I hear the tanager
Sculpture your voice from air?
Ah yes . . . and did your smile leap up
From some child's face?
Did some rush of soft cloud
Portend the rustle of your silken hem?

GOOSE CREEK

By HENRY BELLAMANN

White sky above,
Bright sky under boat.

Sun under sun —
April shine and river shine.

The wispy water grass
and flat lily leaves
ravel out to nothing
on a lost horizon,
like thin layers
of fantastic cloud
streaking mid-space
in a double heaven.

Twin lines of wild geese
converge on distance.
Their cries turn and return
in the infinite globe
of green and crystal blue.

THE SCHOOL OF LOVELINESS

By MYRTLE KOON CHERRYMAN

I thought I had known beauty in my youth:
The flame of sunrise;
The soft curve of a baby's cheek;
Maple-leaves, flushed with the passion of glorious death
In October;
A miracle of violets in April —
Purple-indigo masses among the brown leaves;
The sweep of backward-flying draperies in the Wingéd
Victory;
These, and a thousand other things
Of color and of form
Had seemed beautiful to me.
And so they still seem — yet —
Is it because I am growing old,
Or have I passed some grades
In Life's School of Loveliness?
Last summer I saw from a train-window,
Great sweeps of alkali plains,
Silver in the morning light,
And I thrilled with joy.
A woman near by said, "What a dreary country!"
And I looked at her in surprise.
Yesterday I saw the face of an aged woman,
And it was full of lines,
Telling of love, and labor — and losses;
And I said, "How beautiful!"
To-day I saw a great sheet of rain against a red brick
wall;
In the street below, little lights
Twinkled in the glowing gutters,
And sent dull-gold flashes along the wet pavement;
And my breath came quick with pleasure at the sight.

SONGS OF A TOWN DESERTED

By GLENN WARD DRESBACH

I

So long since seas of chaos surged
Then dried in fiercer breath than theirs,
These three humped mountains have been urged
To little change, and no despairs
Or joys have left a certain trace
On stunted growth or surface scarred. . . .
Each turns a hardened, questioning face
To Distance, hazed or vastly starred —
And so, to them, this town that caught
Sunlight and starlight near them, then
Was left, is only sand well-wrought
To fall and blow in winds again. . . .

II

The veins of copper men had found
And followed, straining as they went
Against rock-currents underground,
Stretch further in gray hills, content.
And all is still again. . . . The shafts
Will rot in waters creeping high
And, drifting there, the moldy drafts
Will be as ghosts that come to sigh.
It is not so because men failed
Against the depths by steel assailed,
But only that no one would buy
The metal torn from rock and run
In fire before the task was done. . . .

III

I saw the dreams of this town grow
In model houses, row by row,
In school and chapel. . . . Silence fills
The streets now answering the hills. . . .
And in the gloom the great white owls
Will sit complaining while there prowls
A lean gray shadow, fire-eyed —
Creeping where once children played
And the hopeful gardens died. . . .
Doors with blown sands will be grayed
And all day the crazed hot sands —
Like the desert's fevered hands —
Will keep up a tapping din
Till the panes are broken in. . . .

IV

Deserted, the town — since it must
Have love — will a strange love find
In the arms of the restless dust,
On the breast of the desert wind.
And the primal mood of that love
Will be written out in the sands,
Will be fostered of skies above
These lovely and awful lands.
And the walls in rains will grow rotten —
Stand only while they must. . . .
Till the tale of this love is forgotten
In an Age-made windful of Dust!

THREE POEMS

By VINCENT STARRETT

GOD'S RIDING

By night, with flogging whip, He rides the breeze,
And dreadful hoofs make thunder in the hills.
The servile grasses and the tortured trees
Bow down and tremble where His trumpet shrills.

Again He rides, and where His banners run
Gay flowers quicken in the trampled sod.
Earth leaps to beauty neath the goading sun,
The pricking rowel on the heel of God.

POETRY

It is a little room, a secret room,
Within a palace falling to decay,
Wherein I tryst with one that was myself . . .
And, O! the world is more than life away!

It is a little ship upon the sea,
Bravely adrift, I know not whither blown,
Nor where the low reef of the harbor lies . . .
But a far bell calls, and I sail alone.

It is a little gate beside a road,
And strait the way to scornful eyes may seem,
But who shall lift the latch and pass within
May pluck the fruit of his unconquered dream.

L'ENVOY

Some day the earth shall pass in fire or dust
Incredibly: what matter how or why! —
Whether the oceans rise to meet the sky,
Or the dark peoples perish of their lust!
If the black vapor of a scourging flame
Point the achievement of our cynic day,
Or an avenging wind, in mammoth play,
Mock the strewn wreckage of our humbled fame!
It is of little moment, late or soon —
Yet is there beauty in the ancient place!
And when the worlds, like straws across the moon,
Are blown into some little crack of Space,
May I, with eager pipe, that life address,
Singing some new and poignant loveliness!

EDITORIALS

Readers may have wondered what has become of the Sketch-Book department which was instituted in the January number of THE MIDLAND. Material for further appearances of this department has been accepted, and it will be presented in the fall numbers. The increased size of the type page may conceal from our readers the fact that THE MIDLAND is presenting considerably more material than in previous years.

If the editor were to choose a material object as a symbol for the dramatic progress of the Middle West during the last hundred years, it would be the walking plow. The breaking plow, in some of its forms — old-fashioned prairie breaker, brush plow, tractor gang — has gone before the crops which have sustained life and which are making possible all our human progress. And the plow in its simpler forms is intrinsically beautiful —

possessed of exquisite symmetry evolved through centuries of adaptation — a shapely thing of cool gray steel. The new furrows of the editor's farm are not such as a Scotch or English master plowman would enjoy. They are humpy and crooked, marred by roots and stumps. But there is fascination in the turning of them — in holding for a little time the plow which has made the way of the race.

Within the past months it has been the editor's good fortune to meet and talk with many of the young college men and women of the west who are interested in writing. He has returned from his journeys profoundly encouraged in regard to our literary future, and deeply hopeful that *THE MIDLAND* may be of some service in the progress which is so abundantly evident. It is for these young writers most of all that *THE MIDLAND* exists. If it can be for them a symbol, a rallying point of earnest and intelligent idealism in the literary development of the region, it asks no other fortune and no higher success.

CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE

HENRY GOODMAN is at present engaged in literary work in New York.

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LOCKIE PARKER of Des Moines, Iowa, was represented in a recent issue of *The Dial*.

H. H. BELLAMANN is a well-known teacher of music at Columbia, S. C. His poetry has appeared in most of the important magazines.

MYRTLE KOON CHERYMAN is one of the leaders of the literary group at Grand Rapids, Michigan.

GLENN WARD DRESBACH, well-known poet and frequent contributor to *THE MIDLAND*, is the author of a new book of poems to be published by Henry Holt and Company.

VINCENT STARRETT, of Chicago, is the editor of a new magazine of the arts called *The Wave*.

